

## THE QUEEN VICTORIA NIAGARA FALLS PARK.

"Moreover, he has left you all his walks,  
His private arbours and new planted orchards,  
On this side Tiber; he hath left them you,  
And to your heirs forever, common pleasures,  
To walk abroad and recreate yourselves."

SHAKESPEARE.

THE readers of Shakespeare's noble tragedy of "Julius Cæsar" need not be told that the above passage is taken from Marc Antony's speech to his countrymen gathered in the Forum round the body of the murdered Cæsar. To rouse the indignation of his hearers against Brutus and the other conspirators Antony first recounts the brilliant victories which the "Great Julius" had won for his country, and then he tells them, apparently very reluctantly, that Cæsar had by his will made the citizens of Rome his heirs and left them among other things his beautiful park on the banks of the Tiber.

The result shows how keenly the Romans appreciated this last gift of the ever-generous Cæsar.

This gift of Cæsar to his countrymen has been brought to my mind when reading the last Report\* of the Niagara Falls Park Commissioners, to which this article is due, and it seemed to me that the extract from Marc Antony's speech given above would serve as a not inappropriate introduction to the story of a gift recently made to the Province of Ontario, a gift similar in kind, but much more splendid in character, than that of Cæsar to the Romans. The gift, I mean, of the noble park at the Falls—gift we may surely call it, for it has cost us nothing, and belongs to us and our heirs forever.

"To walk abroad and recreate ourselves" in the elevating and inspiring presence, too, of one of Nature's grandest works! The park is, I have said, a gift to the people of Ontario. But is it not more? Is it not in truth a gift to all the lovers of the grand and

beautiful in nature, Parthians, Medes and Elamites included, who come like pilgrims to a sacred shrine, to visit that marvel of beauty and grandeur—the Falls of Niagara!

The Commissioners' Report to which I have referred presents itself in an attractive and artistic form, very unusual in Parliamentary blue books. The printing and paper are alike excellent, and the numerous illustrations, giving some of the most striking views both of the Falls and of the park, are in the best style of photogravure. The report itself gives a full and very readable account of the varied work done by the Commissioners. Entering, as they are, on the second decade of their existence, the Commissioners have thought it well to mark the occasion by "giving somewhat in detail the history of the park's scheme from its first suggestion to the present time." The story of the genesis and rapid growth of this important undertaking is one which reflects credit on the Government of Ontario and on all who have been connected with the work. To our brilliant ex-Governor-General, Lord Dufferin, in so many ways so honourably associated with the history of the Dominion, is unquestionably due, as the Commissioners are careful to record, the first public suggestion and the first official action in connection with the park. In the summer of 1878, on the occasion of a casual meeting with the then Governor of the State of New York, Lord Dufferin suggested joint action by the Government of that State and the Government of Ontario in order to rescue this glorious wonder of nature from the clutches of the van-

\* The Report for the year 1895 is the one referred to.



dals who, for their sordid purposes, were rapidly destroying all the natural beauties of the scene. Lord Dufferin followed up his suggestion by an able appeal to the Ontario Government, subsequently pressing the matter on the attention of the Canadian people in his address at the opening in 1879 of the Provincial Exhibition in Toronto. Though the scheme suggested by Lord Dufferin was at first looked upon by many as impracticable and visionary, his eloquent advocacy of it soon bore fruit. On the 2nd of March, 1880, a memorial signed by nearly seven hundred literary and scientific men in England, the United States and Canada, was presented simultaneously to the Governor-General of Canada and the Governor of the State of New York, invoking the united action of both in carrying out Lord Dufferin's proposal. Did space permit we should like to give this unique memorial *in extenso*, because it is impossible better to explain the moral and intellectual grounds on which the joint endorsement of the two Governments was sought in a matter which the memorialists claimed to be "a proper concern of the civilized world." No action was taken by the Ontario Government on this memorial until 1885. Four years before that date, however, the Legislature of the State of New York had passed "an Act to authorize the selection, location and appropriation of certain lands in the Village of Niagara Falls for a State reservation and to preserve the scenery of the Falls of Niagara."

Under the provisions of this Act, the New York State Commissioners secured about "107 acres of land, embracing what was known as "Prospect Park," together with Goat and Bath Islands and the small adjacent islets, with a strip along the main shore to Port Day, etc., at a total cost, including arbitration and other incidental charges, of nearly a million and a half dollars. The delay in the action of the Ontario Government was caused by their belief that the subject was one which should properly be dealt with by

the Dominion Government. When, however, it became manifest that there was no prospect of this being done, the Provincial Government in March, 1885, passed an Act "for the preservation of the natural scenery about Niagara Falls." This Act authorized the appointment of a Board of Commissioners whose duties were "to select such lands in the vicinity of the Falls as would in their opinion be proper to acquire for the purposes of restoring the scenery to its natural conditions and to preserve the same from further deterioration, as well as to afford the visitors facilities for observing the points of interest in the vicinity."

On the 25th of April, 1885, or within less than a month of the passing of the above Act, Col. Gzowski, now Sir Casimir Gzowski, Messrs. J. W. Langmuir and J. Grant McDonald were appointed Commissioners under its provisions.

The Commissioners were all men of proved business capacity in whom the public had entire confidence. Under their advice an area of territory in the neighbourhood of the Falls, embracing about 154 acres, and extending from the Clifton House southward to and including Cedar and Dufferin Islands, was secured for the purposes of a public park at a cost of \$436,000.

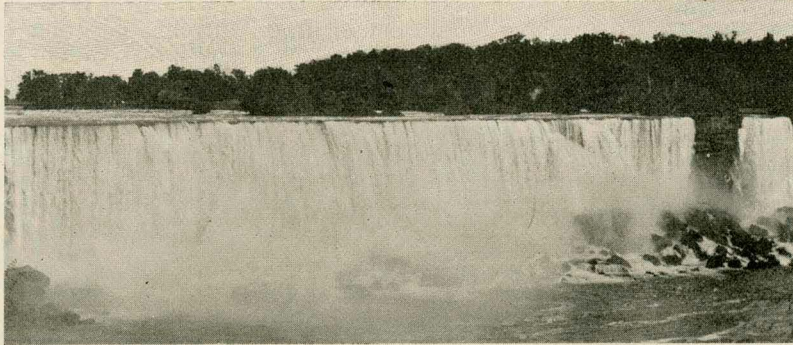
The Government of Ontario, in authorizing the establishment of the park, had wisely laid it down as an indispensable condition that the park should not entail a permanent financial burden on the Province; and, consequently, that the interest on the cost of the land, as well as all other necessary current expenses and incidental charges should eventually be borne out of the park revenue. How to find the ways and means to provide this necessary revenue was, the Commissioners inform us, by no means the least difficult part of the task imposed upon them. The territory of 154 acres was subsequently increased by the acquirement of the chain reserve along the Niagara River from Fort Erie to the town of Niagara, a distance of twenty-two





THE CANADIAN HORSESHOE FALLS.



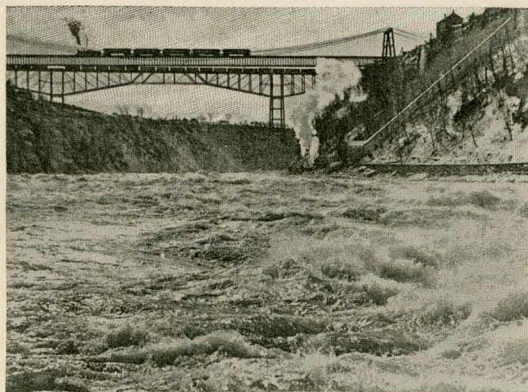


AMERICAN FALLS, VIEWED FROM THE CANADIAN SIDE.

miles, and all the lands lying below the high bank of the river, as well as the reserve at Queenston Heights. The entire area now vested in the Commissioners amounts to 675 acres, not including the water lots or lands under water.

The Commissioners inform us that they kept constantly in view from the first the necessity of promptly undertaking the improvement of the various properties placed from time to time under their jurisdiction and of bringing them as far as possible in harmony with the natural surroundings, while at the same time making every practicable provision for the comfort and enjoyment of the visitors. The Commissioners were, however, reluctantly compelled to hasten slowly. The revenue derived from the park for many years was very small, while a large amount was required for the half-yearly interest of debentures which they had to meet. To exercise the most rigid economy, to content themselves for several years with merely keeping the grounds in good order and condition and to forego for the time any improvement, however desirable, which involved any considerable expenditure was, therefore, absolutely necessary. Bearing this in mind, all who now walk through the

beautiful and well-kept grounds of the park will be disposed to give the Commissioners ample credit for the good work which in the face of these difficulties they have accomplished. But those only can fully appreciate the character and extent of that work who were familiar with the place before it came under their control. They only can recognize what an immense improvement has been effected sweeping away the hideous eye-sores with which bad taste or greed had disfigured the grounds, and they only will be ready to do full justice to the taste and skill which have been brought to bear in laying out the park in such a way as to bring out to advantage all the great natural beauties of this glorious piece of the Creator's handiwork.



THE WHIRLPOOL RAPIDS.



They, too, alone can tell what a boon has been secured to the visitors to the Falls by rescuing them from the attacks of the crowds of sharks, hucksters and pedlars, who used to infest the place, taxing so heavily their purse and temper. All these pests are now banished as effectually as the vermin were banished from Ireland by its patron Saint, and the lover of nature is now allowed to enjoy in peace and quiet the beauty of the glorious scene before him.

If the visitor who returns to the park after an absence of many years should be a native of Scotland, he may possibly, as he contrasts the difference between the now and then, recall the distich with which some local poet celebrated the worthy who made the first good roads through a rough and mountainous region of the Highlands:

"Had you seen these roads before they were made,  
You'd bless the memory of General Wade."

So far the Commissioners *sacro vate carent*. They have found no sacred poet to immortalize their labours.

Part of the territory quite recently placed under the jurisdiction of the Park Commissioners is the historic and picturesque grounds (12 acres in extent) formerly known as the military reserve of Queenston Heights—where, in 1812, was fought the celebrated battle, and where on the summit of the mountain, commanding an outlook over the smiling and fruitful country and across the Ontario Lake, now stands the noble monument erected to the hero of the battle, the illustrious Major-General Brock, who met his death upon the field. The grounds and the monument in question had for many years been under the jurisdiction of the Provincial Government, but had not been maintained, the Commissioners tell us, "in a manner worthy of the monument or of the hero it commemorates."

Every patriotic Canadian will rejoice to know that these interesting historic grounds with which "so many glorious associations are connected" have been

placed under the control of the Commissioners, thereby ensuring their proper care and preservation in the future. Already, indeed, although scarcely a year has elapsed since the property came into their hands, a marked improvement has been effected in the aspect of the place. The dense growth of brush obstructing the view has been removed, new paths made, new vistas opened and much done in various ways for the convenience of the many visitors to this favourite resort which it is well that every young Canadian should visit on patriotic as well as æsthetic grounds.

In reading the report of the Commissioners, one cannot fail to be struck with the number of difficult and complicated questions, legal, engineering and financial, with which they have had to deal. In the engineering department, fortunately, they have had the benefit of the services and experience not only of the Park Superintendent, a competent civil engineer, but also the great professional knowledge of Sir Casimir Gzowski, first Chairman of the Commission; while in their financial difficulties they have had the advantage of the large business experience and ability of Mr. J. W. Langmuir, who succeeded Sir Casimir Gzowski as Chairman of the Board on the retirement of the former in 1892.

The geographic monograph on the history of the Falls, by Prof. Gilbert, of the United States Geological Survey, which is appended to the report, will be read with pleasure by all who take an interest in the grand operations of natural agents, giving, as it does, a scientific account of the formation through the "æons of the ages" of the present bed of the Niagara River and also of the slow but constant recession during many thousand years of the mighty cataract from the Queenston Heights to its present position, a distance of fourteen miles.

The partial list of the "flora" of the Falls furnished by the chief gardener of the park, contained in the appendix to the report, shows that in addition to its many other attractive features, the

Falls Park is a perfect paradise for botanists and supplies a most interesting field for the lovers of natural history. In this connection the Commissioners quote the remark of Professor Macoun, the Dominion botanist: "I consider Queenston Heights, the valley of the Niagara River and the neighbourhood of the falls, as far up as Chippewa, the best botanical grounds in Canada."

The thanks, not merely of this community, but of the lovers of nature everywhere, are assuredly due to the Government of Ontario for the enlightened spirit they have shown in promoting the establishment of the Niagara Park, and for their practical wisdom in carrying out the scheme. Like thanks are also due to the Commissioners for the zeal and ability with which they have discharged (without fee or reward, be it remembered) the important public trust committed to their charge.

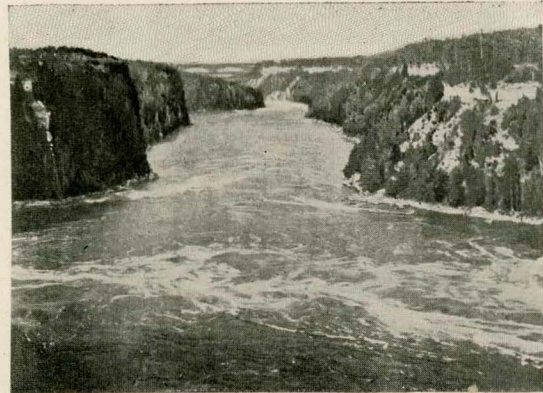
The most important work accomplished by the Commissioners in connection with the park is, doubtless, the construction of the electric railway, eight miles in length along the north bank of the Niagara River, to connect Queenston and Chippewa, the former being the most westerly port on Lake Ontario, and the latter the most easterly on Lake Erie. This road, which is substantially constructed and admirably equipped, is a wonderful boon to the ordinary excursionist, as he is enabled thereby to reach Table Rock without the fatigue of a walk of two miles and a half from the Grand Trunk depot. It moreover gives him access to many points of special interest on the river which previously were beyond his reach. The Commissioners receive a rental of \$10,000 per annum from the railway company for the right of way and other privileges. This sum, with \$25,000 per annum (to be raised after ten years to \$35,000) received from another company for the franchise of the use for commercial purposes of a portion of the enormous water of the Falls, and the sum of \$8,200 per annum as rent for a stone building used as a restaurant and other purposes, yield together an amount which very

nearly suffices for the payment of the annual interest and sinking fund as well as for the maintenance of the park. So that it is necessary only to supplement it by levying a small toll on such of the visitors to the park as desire to see points of interest where guides or costly structural appliances are needed. It may be well to add that the electric railway has not in any way impaired any of the natural beauties of the place, nor has the leasing of a portion of the water power sensibly diminished the volume of water passing over the Falls. Under the Commissioners' regime the natural attractions of the Falls and its neighbourhood and the facilities for seeing them have been, as we have seen, greatly increased in many ways, and we cannot be surprised to find that as a consequence the number of visitors has also been correspondingly increased. In 1866 the estimated number of visitors was two hundred thousand; last year it was five hundred thousand.

Here perhaps we might pause, but we cannot but feel that our story of the park would be incomplete if it did not contain some description of the most striking features of the Falls themselves. It would be the play of Hamlet with the part of Hamlet omitted. The most satisfactory way perhaps of executing this duty would be to present the reader with selections taken either from the Commissioners' Report or Mr. Barham's volume, called "Niagara,"\* giving some of the best descriptions of the Falls, rapids and other objects of interest by the most celebrated persons who have left a record of their impressions. Among these worthies Father Hennepin is doubtless entitled to the place of honour, as he was probably the first European who looked upon the Falls, certainly the first of whose visit we have any record. Two short extracts from Father Hennepin's volume, published in 1689, will suffice for our present purpose. They have a distinct mediæval flavour: "Betwixt the Lakes Ontario

\* This volume, published about 50 years ago, contains descriptions of Niagara by various travellers.





THE WHIRLPOOL.

and Erie there is a vast and prodigious cadence of water which falls down after a surprising and astonishing manner, insomuch that the universe does not afford its parallel. 'Tis true, Italy Suedland boasts of some such thing, but we may well say they are but sorry patterns when compared to this of which we now speak. At the foot of this horrible precipice we meet with the River Niagara, which is not above a quarter of a league broad, but is wonderfully deep in some places. It is so rapid above this descent that it violently hurries down the wild beasts while endeavouring to pass it to feed on the other side, they not being able to withstand the force of its current, which inevitably casts them headlong above six hundred feet high.

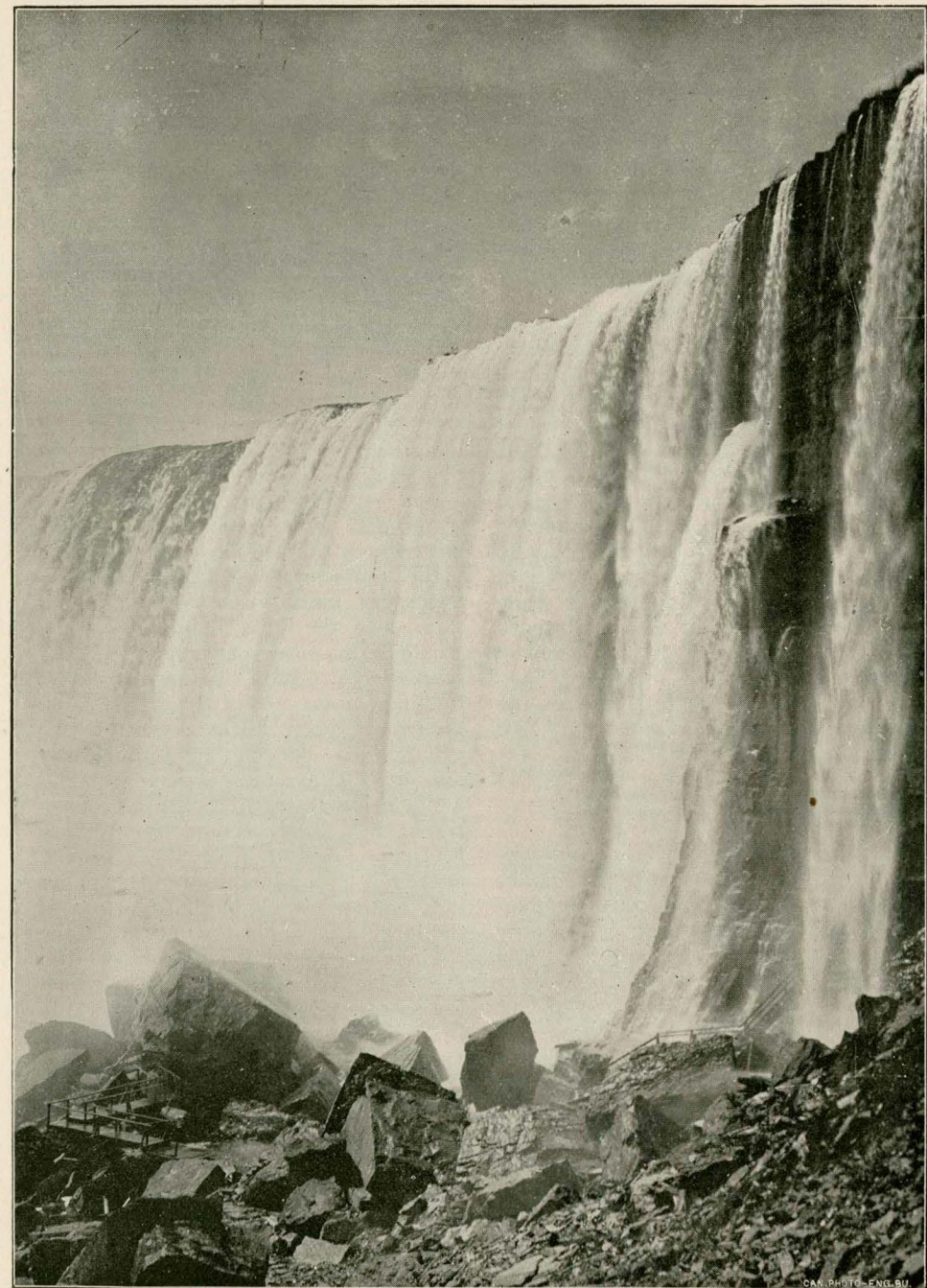
"This wonderful downfall is compounded of two great cross streams of water, and two falls with an isle sloping along the middle of it. The waters which fall from this horrible precipice do foam and boil after the most hideous manner imaginable, making an outrageous noise more terrible than that of thunder, for when the wind blows out of the south their dismal roaring may be heard more than fifteen leagues off."

One cannot be surprised that to the eye of the excited and awe-struck priest "the terrible precipice" should have seemed "above six hundred feet high."

Among the many distinguished men and women whose descriptions we have before us are, Captain Basil Hall, J. S. Buckingham, N. P. Willis, Tom Moore, Major Hamilton (author of "Cyril Thornton"), Mrs. Jameson, Mrs. Sigourney, Charles Dickens, the Duke of Argyle, and last, but not least, our Canadian litterateur, the Rev. Principal Grant of Queen's College, with many others—a perfect literary symposium. What Tom Moore, the popular and eloquent Irish poet wrote about the Falls cannot fail to be read with interest. We feel that it is a poet who writes: "I felt as if approaching the residence of the Deity; the tears started into my eyes; and I remained, for moments after we had lost sight of the scene, in that delicious absorption which enthusiasm alone can produce. My whole heart and soul ascended towards the Divinity in a swell of devout admiration which I never before experienced. Oh, bring the atheist here and he cannot return an atheist. I pity the man who can coldly sit down to write a description of these ineffable wonders. It is impossible by pen or pencil to give even a faint idea of their magnificence. Painting is lifeless, and the most burning words of poetry have all been lavished upon inferior and ordinary subjects. We must have new combinations of language to describe the Falls of Niagara."

This feeling on Moore's part may account for his not attempting to write any poems on the subject. I should like to give some descriptions by other writers, especially Major Hamilton and the Duke of Argyle, but I must be content with quoting here one or two striking and eloquent passages from Charles Dickens' notes on America, written in 1842, telling of his emotions when standing for the first time on Table Rock.

"It was not until I came to Table Rock, and looked, Great Heaven! on what a fall of bright green water, that



THE HORSESHOE FALLS FROM BELOW.



it came upon me in its full might and majesty. Then when I felt how near to my Creator I was standing. The first effect and enduring one—instant and lasting—of the tremendous spectacle was peace, peace of mind, tranquility, calm, recollection of the dead, great thoughts of eternal rest and happiness, nothing of gloom and terror. Niagara was at once stamped upon my heart an image of beauty, to remain there changeless and indelible, until its pulses cease to beat forever."

The preceding extracts all refer to the view of the "Horse Shoe Falls" ("the crowning glory" of the whole scene as the Commissioners rightly call it), as seen in spring or summer or autumn. Glorious and beautiful the Falls assuredly are at all these seasons, and each season has its own special charms, but never perhaps are they so dazzling, so terribly beautiful, never do they exhibit such a variety of strange, wondrous and fantastic forms as when after weeks of continued and intense cold they have arrayed themselves in their gorgeous winter apparel. Then all things within the influence of the "everlasting incense of the waters," to use Fanny Kemble's words—

"Seem to suffer a *Frost* change  
Into something rich and strange."

Objects mean and unsightly in themselves are then converted for the nonce into things of beauty under their mantle of pearly frozen spray or feathery rime. Look! What magnificent and exquisite creations have come into existence under the wonder-working wand of the Frost King! Here, with giant arm he has piled up his mighty ice-cones, fashioned his colossal columns of ice, or hung out behind the tumbling waters his great curtains of jewelled icicles. There, he has spun out as with fairy fingers (should I not say breathed out?) those gossamer and feathery formations which Principal Grant describes so graphically in the following passage:

"After a few days of hard frost in winter the Falls become more like a vision of some enchanted land than a

real scene in the world we are living in. No marvels wrought by genii and magicians in Eastern tales could surpass the wonderful creations that rise along the surrounding banks and hang over the walls of the cataract. Glittering wreaths of icicles like jewelled diadems gleam on the brow of every projecting rock and jutting crag. Arches, pillars and porticos of shining splendour are grouped beneath the overhanging cliffs, giving fanciful suggestions of fairy palaces beyond. Every fallen fragment of rock under its icy covering becomes a marble column, pyramid or obelisk, and masses of frozen spray stand up here and there in graceful and statuesque forms, easily shaped by imagination into the half-finished work of a sculptor."

Did space permit I should like to give some description of the rapids both above and below the Falls which in the opinion of some competent judges "possess more interest and beauty than even the Falls themselves" and particularly of the marvellous "beauty of the Great Canon" below the Falls, holding in its grasp the aggregated volume of water hurled over the two great Falls. Or again of the lovely spot locally known as "Foster's Flats," a mile below the whirlpool, a spot heretofore but rarely visited by ordinary tourists. Space, however, forbids, especially as my intention in this paper is to confine myself to that portion of the large area under the control of the Commissioners lying south of Clifton House on the banks of the river which the Commissioners propose especially to designate as "The Niagara Falls Park."

The writer will be excused for introducing here some notice of his personal experiences at the Falls, especially as some of the phenomena which it was his good fortune to witness are unusual and are certainly but seldom mentioned in the published descriptions of the Falls. Early in the forties and the fifties the writer made several visits to the Falls in winter at times when they presented some of their most magnificent winter aspects. On one

visit near the end of a winter of exceptionally intense and steady cold the ice formations were on a truly colossal scale. The columns of thick-ribbed ice on the Canadian side were of extraordinary dimensions, some upwards of 20 or 30 feet across at the base. Here and there these mighty pillars, which seem placed by the Divine Architect to support the overhanging cliffs, were shot with streaks of bright colours. A noble ice cone (like the famous cones at the Falls of Montmorency in Quebec) was formed under the Horse Shoe Fall near the Canadian side, about 2-3 of the height of the Falls. The cone sloped inwards to the land, and steps having been cut in the ice, the writer had little difficulty in climbing to the top of the cone and standing just at the edge of the mighty sheet of water. When looking down one could "snatch a trembling glance" into the dread abyss. It was a strange and not to be forgotten experience. On the same occasion, the exact date I do not know, the writer was able, owing to the screen of thick curtains of icicles which hung down from the rocks behind the sheet of water, to pass behind the Falls, as far as "Termination Rock" without being wet, though dispensing with the usual oilskin wrappings without which at other times one would be drenched in a few seconds. It was no doubt on this same occasion that he witnessed the extraordinary phenomenon of a mighty ice jam above the American Falls, over which but little water was then passing, when people crossed to and fro on the ice between the American side and Goat Island.

One more personal reminiscence must not be omitted, although the subject is neither heroic nor æsthetic. It was a rude wooden tombstone-like tablet placed on the bank of the river about a hundred yards from Table Rock, under the guardianship of the "genius loci," a one-legged old soldier, who eked out his living in some way from the tablet. On this rude monument was recorded the sad fate of an unfortunate young woman who had lost her life while endeavouring to pick

a plant growing on the brow of the cliff. After stating the cause of her untimely death and that the young lady was "very remarkable for her botanical requirements," and a favourite pupil of Professor Field, it concluded with the following somewhat rugged and uncouth, if pathetic, lines:

"Ladies! most beauteous of the human race,  
Beware of a dangerous place;  
For at the age of twenty-three  
Martha Rugg was launched into eternity."

Those who were familiar with the Falls forty years ago will probably remember this unique monument and pardon its mention here.

In the foregoing descriptions of the Falls we have quoted merely the prose accounts and taken no notice of the poetic ones. As a matter of fact, few poets of note (with the exception of Mrs. Sigourney, the American Hemans) have essayed the difficult task of describing them in verse. Their lyres seem hushed by the thunder of the cataract. Mrs. Sigourney, indeed, has written several very beautiful poems on the subject, and her "Farewell to Niagara," the extract from which is given below, is very fine:

"To breathe  
Farewell is agony. For we have roamed  
Beside thee at our will, and drawn thy  
voice  
Into our secret soul, and felt how good  
Thus to be here, until we half implored,  
While long in wildering ecstasy we gazed,  
To build us tabernacles, and behold  
Always thy majesty."

One wonders how one of our really great poets would have dealt with this grand theme. How, for example, would the author of *Thaliba* and *Madoc* (if indeed we can count "The Lakist" Southey among our great poets)—how would he have found words to adequately express his feelings of admiration? We know he almost exhausts the English language in telling "How the waters come down at Lodore"—a liliputian fall among the English lakes, which is to Niagara as Lake Windermere to the Atlantic Ocean. He surely would have used up not one, but many languages in describing Niagara. Of all our English poets,





FROM A PHOTO.

A WINTER SCENE AT NIAGARA FALLS.